I am heretical enough to think that a good deal of time is almost wasted in straining after superfine reading. Readiness and accuracy are the qualities we should chiefly aim at securing. Natural expression will usually follow in their wake if the matter be fairly well understood. He who reads easily, and understands what he reads, will rarely fail to have his imagination stirred by the scene brought before his mind s eye, or to give vocal evidence of his appreciation of it. This natural display of feeling is far better than the artificial substitute worked up at such pains and cost of time.

The difficulty experienced in so many schools of securing distinct, natural, and expressive reading is mainly due to faulty training at the beginning of the school course. The pupils here are allowed to say the words one by one, without grouping them into simple phrases, and, of course, without any approach to natural expression. Where this style of so-called reading has been practised for a year or two a thoroughly bad habit is formed and engrained, which it costs years of labour and of worry to correct. By insisting on distinct natural reading from the first all this could be spared. I hold that from the earliest lessons of their easiest book pupils should be trained to read in a natural way From the first they should be accustomed to group the words in little phrases, and to modulate the voice as they habitually do in talking. Reading of this kind is easily secured, provided teachers take pains to make the little scholars familiar with all the words before the reading is attempted. For this the words, and not the sentences, must be the units of instruction. Where large reading-sheets are available, which is practically everywhere, the words can be thoroughly worked up before reading with perfect ease. When little books are introduced the difficult words should still be worked up first of all. Any teacher with a trifle of ingenuity can devise better means of doing this than the stupid practice of reading sentences backwards, which bestows as much attention on the simplest and best-known words as on the most difficult and unfamiliar A good plan is to have the hard words neatly printed on the blackboard before the lesson begins, when they can be readily worked up. A quicker plan is for the teacher to read over each sentence or paragraph distinctly, and then have the difficult words pointed out by all, and worked up by spelling and saying. With adequate preparation of some such kind an easy and natural style of reading can be secured without difficulty Such work as this is best taken with the classes standing on the floor, and the teacher need not be afraid of getting behind the pupils to see that all are pointing to the correct words. I would lay it down as a fundamental principle in teaching the reading of the younger classes that the difficult words should be adequately worked up first of all. Without such preparation they can only prove traps and stumbling-blocks in reading the sentences. While pupils have to stop every now and then to puzzle out an unfamiliar word fluent and natural reading is plainly out of the question.

Explanation of the language of the reading-lessons is often unsatisfactory Its consideration is now restricted by the time and effort needed to overcome the mechanical difficulties of reading. If these were lessened the training in comprehension could easily be improved. But ready reading is more important than even comprehension, and should not be sacrificed for it. No doubt pupils understand fairly well much that they cannot state precisely in other words.

Recitation is for the most part very fairly done, and is generally well known but the meaning of what is learned is often enough ill understood. Unless they are very short, three poems should be enough to learn. They should be chosen for their worth, and ought to be mental treasures for a lifetime. Not a few of the poems one hears recited are mere rubbish.

In spelling there has been little improvement on the unsatisfactory work described in last year's report. It is little, if at all, better taught in some of the larger schools than in small ones, where defects are so much more excusable. The time devoted to this subject appears to me more than ample for teaching it well. Where time can be spared for it, the mistakes (corrected, of course) should be put on the blackboard and thoroughly taught, and teachers would do well to make out lists of them for revisal. Blundering in constantly-recurring words, such as "there" and "their," is very common. Our failure to teach spelling better seems to me to indicate a serious want of good attention, and of the moral influence and control that teachers should exercise over their pupils.

In the great majority of the schools writing and drawing are taught with very considerable success, and they are well done in many The work in exercise-books is also neat and careful. The correction of these exercises cannot, however, be commended. It is intrusted too much to pupil-teachers, without sufficient supervision from those in charge.

Arithmetic is for the most part done slowly and with insufficient accuracy in the lower classes the upper ones show much higher proficiency in it. Mr Dickinson recognises improved readiness in dealing with problems. It is, however, in the mere manipulation of figures that pupils fall short. The cause of this, and the great blot on the teaching of the subject, is the widespread, the nearly universal, failure to teach addition thoroughly in the preparatory classes and Standard I. The backwardness in adding and subtracting, so prevalent here, are unknown in most of the other districts of the colony, and we cannot banish it too soon. The questions used in testing the arithmetic during the greater part of the year were supplied by the Minister Like all questions, they did not please everybody but they were, on the whole, fair and suitable tests. The Standard VI. questions, however, took more time to do than can well be spared on a busy examination-day Mental arithmetic was, on the whole, poorly done. With the imperfect training to add, it could hardly be otherwise.

The work in composition of Standards IV and V was disappointing in quality and quantity Here Standard III. did fairly, and Standard VI., on the whole, creditably The prevailing faults in Standards IV and V were a great dearth of matter and inability to divide what there was into sentences. To improve composition three things are needed—a selection of subjects about which pupils have a sufficient range of knowledge (geographical and most historical subjects are quite unsuitable), a better command and understanding of language derived from wider reading, and regular study of the structure of sentences and their sequence in paragraphs. At least one exercise